



# Field Notes

News from Traditional Arts Indiana

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## Jon Kay — new TAI director

In June, Traditional Arts Indiana will welcome a new director, Jonathan Kay. A native Hoosier, Jon returns to Indiana after working in Florida for the past seven years.

Jon will continue the good work carried out for five years by Erin Roth and he will also move TAI in new directions. Jon's experience ranges from ecotourism to elderhostels. He is an experienced teacher, having presented technical support and training workshops in traditional arts to artists, teachers, parks personnel, and local citizens.

Jon has brought experience-based learning to K-12 classrooms and developed teacher resource guides, designed heritage arts celebrations, conducted teacher retreat weekends, and presented folk music. Himself a musician, Jon has coordinated weekend banjo camps featuring nationally recognized old time banjoists and produced recordings and soundtracks.



Adjusting the headdress before performance at Share-A-Legacy Day.  
— Photo by Ilze Akerbergs



Young Indian dancers of the Aradhana Institute of Classical and Folk Dance perform at the Indiana Historical Society.

— Photo by Ilze Akerbergs

## On the Road . . .

### *Family Share-A-Legacy Day*

On March 20th, the Indiana Historical Society hosted the third annual Share-A-Legacy Day. Through dance, music, storytelling, and hands-on activities, families and neighborhoods in the Indianapolis area shared their unique stories, skills, and traditions.

TAI sponsored three groups of traditional artists. The Aradhana Institute of Classical and Folk Dance, with director Archana Thaker, demonstrated Indian classical, modern, and folk dance. Student-dancers, ranging in age from elementary school to adult, made the stage come alive with glittering and colorful costumes. Robert Turner and the Silver Heart Gospel Singers had the audience clapping along to some of Indiana's finest traditional gospel music. Prince Julius Akanbi Adeniyi and two of his apprentices closed out the day with a spirited demonstration of West African drumming (see feature article on p.3).

*The Grant County Survey:  
Traditional arts in organized settings*

TAI fieldworker Lisa Gabbert has been driving to Marion throughout the winter to acquaint herself with the traditional arts of the area. To her surprise, she discovered that the best entrée to traditional arts in Grant County was not through individuals, but through organizations of like-minded people learning from each other and enjoying each other's company.

Traditional arts and formal organizations would seem to be a contradiction in terms. Yet, the Quilter's Hall of Fame, the Central Indiana Bluegrass Association, the Eastern Woodlands Carving Club, and Heaven Bound, all proved to be important contacts to local artists. Heaven Bound is an African-American musical religious drama, written in the 1930's and revived by Joan Bowman in 1990.

Through these clubs, Lisa made contact with some of Marion's many traditional artists: hand quilters Doris Cook and Marguerite Cox, stand-up bass player Charlie Whirl, nationally known caricature carver Tom Brown, and Ben Cash, who is best known for his old-world Santas and other fantasy figures.



Carver Ben Cash with old-world-style Santa.

— Photo by Lisa Gabbert



Indian children perform at Share-A-Legacy Day.  
— Photo by Ilze Akerbergs

The Marion Public Library provided Lisa with office space as a home base from which to conduct fieldwork. Help was freely given by the project's other collaborators — the Minnetrista Cultural Center in Muncie and Traditional Arts Indiana. TAI *Field Notes* will be featuring Lisa's fieldnotes about some of these traditional artists in future issues.

### From the Field . . .

*John Zile, 63, is a blacksmith in Sulphur Springs, Indiana. He got interested in blacksmithing about 30 years ago and has recently become president of the Indiana Blacksmithing Association. Folklore graduate student Katherine Forgacs met with him in March 2004 to learn the creative process of blacksmithing. Below is an excerpt from Katherine Forgacs's fieldnotes.*

"Let me get you a pair of glasses." John Zile passes me a pair of plastic goggles to shield my eyes. "Something might come off there." He's referring to the anvil next to his forge where he's about to begin hammering a new project out of a piece of steel.

I watch attentively as he stokes the fire with a poker fashioned from an old length of iron. As John activates the blower switch, life-giving oxygen flows

From the spoken word to the hand-made object, individuals express themselves in ways firmly grounded and deeply connected to community. Traditional Arts Indiana, a partnership of the Indiana Arts Commission and the Indiana University Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, works locally with individuals and organizations to promote and facilitate cultural documen-

tation and public programming. The National Endowment for the Arts, the Indiana Arts Commission, Indiana University, and private donations support the work of TAI. For more information, call (812) 855-0418, <tradarts@indiana.edu>.

*The TAI Team*

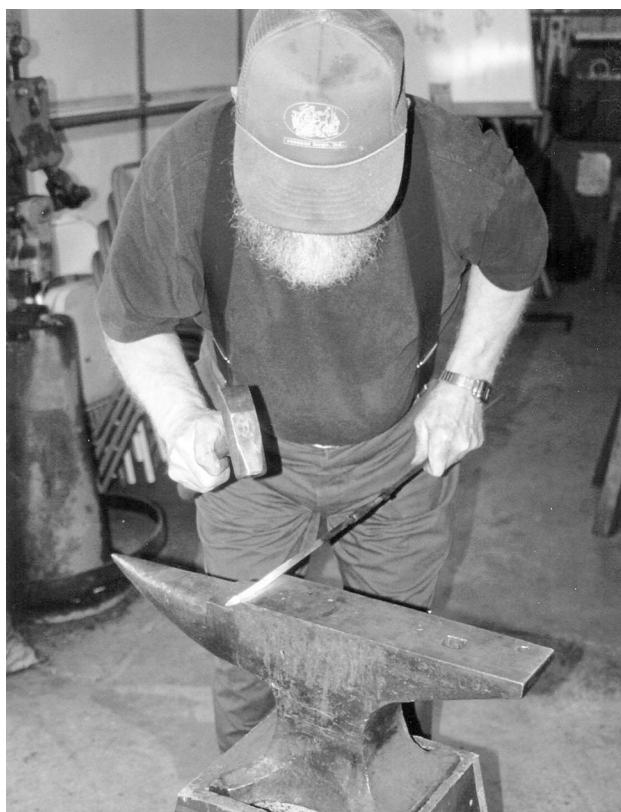
Ilze Akerbergs, Technical Assistant  
Beth Campbell, Satellite Folklorist  
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Inta Carpenter, Interim Director  
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Meryl Krieger, Technical Assistant  
Amanda Robbins, Administrative Assistant  
*Fieldworkers 2003-4:* Ilze Akerbergs, Delia Alexander, Inta Carpenter, Katherine Forgacs, Lisa Gabbert, Erin Roth, Joanne Stuttgart



from beneath the forge, rushing through the glowing coals. The fire feeds hungrily. Smoke swirls up and back into the flue as the flames metamorphose from orange to yellow to a mauve swirl. As the wisps of smoke diminish, John explains that the fire is getting “cleaner.” Each little “whoof” announces that the heat is forcing gases out of the coal. Little sparks signal the formation of “clinkers,” masses of impurities extracting from the “green” coal.

When the fire is ready, John grips the stick of shiny silver steel with a pair of long-handled iron tongs. He stuffs it into the flame, burying it under the hot coals, manually shifting coke — the substance left after gases escape from the heated coal — closer to the center of the fire. After about thirty



Zile shapes a ladle handle with his cross peen hammer.  
— Photo by Katherine Forgacs

seconds, he digs around in the coals with the tongs for the now blackened and glowing piece of metal. I step back, making sure to keep out of his way, although I am equally interested in documenting his creative process with my camera. Moving quickly, John rests the glowing end of the steel bar on the anvil, takes up his cross peen hammer, and strikes several times before letting the hammer head tap

on the anvil table. Without pause, he strikes again, occasionally rotating the metal bar with the tongs in his other hand to distribute the blows evenly.

Although at the moment John is shaping a decorative handle for a ladle, he tells me that a larger piece of metal would require more than one person to deliver the necessary striking force to change its shape. The master blacksmith would hold the metal on the anvil and demonstrate with his hammer for his apprentice where and how hard to hit the metal. There would be no verbal communication between the two. Through years of practice, the two blacksmiths would establish a rhythm. Because the apprentice would be using a sledgehammer (in contrast to the master's smaller hammer), he had to learn to gauge his master's expectations accurately.

## Creating, Changing, Renewing

### *Portraits of Indiana's Traditional Artists*

*Prince Julius Akanbi Adeniyi and his apprentices,  
Keesha Dixon and Anthony DeMar*

Prince Julius's grandfather was a well respected chief in Nigeria. As a very small child, Prince Julius would climb onto his grandfather's lap as he was drumming, following his grandfather's movements by placing his hands on top of his grandfather's. For the past year, Prince Julius has been teaching the art of Nigerian Yoruba drumming to Keesha Dixon and Anthony DeMar, helping them



Apprentices Keesha Dixon and Anthony DeMar playing hand percussion and singing West African songs at Share-A-Legacy Day.  
— Photo by Ilze Akerbergs



Dancing to the rhythms of Prince Julius and his apprentices.

— Photo by Ilze Akerbergs

connect to their African heritage. Though born in the United States, both stress that “reclaiming” their language and Yoruban culture is important. “I’m African not because I was born in Africa, but because Africa was born in me,” says Keesha.

In addition to learning how to play the drum, they learned how to make it — from slaughtering the goat and skinning the hide to constructing the drum itself. Yoruba language was part of their education as well. The rhythm of the drum projects the words of Yoruba language and tells a story: “If you cannot say it, you cannot play it,” says Keesha.

### The Bulletin Board

- July 31, Saturday, 7pm – Good Ole Summertime Series: Bluegrass at the Buskirk Chumley Theater in Bloomington. TAI is sponsoring Indiana bluegrass bands *Born Again* and *New Frontier*.
- August 14, Saturday, 10am-2:30pm – TAI State Fair Fiddle Contest. Indiana State Fairgrounds.
- August 19, Thursday, Noon-6pm – TAI Day at the Fair. Musical performances by TAI-sponsored groups. Indiana State Fairgrounds.
- August 19, Thursday – TAI Day at the Fair. 2004 State Fair Masters awards ceremony. Indiana State Fairgrounds.

Keesha’s and Anthony’s enthusiasm and conviction for their art delighted the audience at their recent “graduation” concert at the Indiana Historical Society. This performance marked the end of their apprenticeship year with Prince Julius. They filled the stage with various types of hand-made drums and percussive instruments. Kids and grown-ups clapped and bounced to the rhythm, as Prince Julius encouraged members of the audience to come onto the stage for a rousing finale of dance, rhythm, and drums.